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ESSAY *on* HUMAN LIBERTY. By RICHARD KIRWAN, *E/q.*
L. L. D. F. R. S. and M. R. I. A.

1. *POWER* denotes the principle of action. Action denotes the *exercise* of power. Read July
28th 1798.

2. *Necessity* denotes the conceived *impossibility* of the non-existence of any thing.

3. *HENCE* necessity is of three kinds, metaphysical, physical and moral.

AN object is said to be *metaphysically* necessary when its absence involves a contradiction; and to be *physically* necessary when its non-existence contradicts the established laws of corporeal nature, or when it cannot fail to exist, or cannot exist otherwise than it does, without a miracle.

Lastly, THAT is said to be *morally* necessary whose non-existence is contrary to the laws by which moral agents constantly and universally govern their conduct. On the other hand we call that future object *certain*, which will not fail to come to pass.

4. HENCE certainty differs from necessity in this, that what is necessary *cannot*, and what is certain *will not*, fail to happen. What is necessary is certain, but not *vice versa*.

5. A power is said to be *free* when its exercise in every sense is morally possible.

6. *Will or the power or faculty of willing* is said to be *free*, when it may act or not act, or *elect*, without the constraint of moral necessity; for no other can be applied to the will. The application of this definition requires some farther observations.

7. 1st, We must observe, that the will can form no volition, but with a view of obtaining some *good* either real or apparent. For all rational agents *necessarily* covet happiness, and esteem that to be good which promotes or constitutes any degree of happiness, and consequently pursue it, with an ardour proportioned to the degree it exposes to their view. A volition like every action requires a sufficient reason for its existence, and in this
case

case none can be adduced but the attainment of some degree of happiness. The good or advantage thus held forth to the mind is called the *motive* or final cause of its action. But the efficient cause of the volition is the mind itself; the term *motive* is in some degree improper as it conveys the idea of activity, whereas it is in reality passive, being the term towards which the mind moves, or from which it recedes.

8. 2d, As the will can never act without a motive, the *connexion* between a volition and some motive is metaphysically necessary, it being grounded on the very nature of the mind, or of an intelligent agent, which cannot act but with a view of obtaining happiness. But with respect to *particular motives* the following distinctions are to be observed:

9. If the good presented to the mind be apparently *infinite*, its connexion with a correspondent volition is then morally necessary, but if the good presented be *finite*, the connexion must be weaker; but still, as it is no less real since it exists, it is *certain*.

Note—CERTAINTY is an ambiguous term, as it sometimes denotes the reality of an object, sometimes the foundation or cause of that reality, and sometimes the firm persuasion of the mind of the reality of an object. Here it is employed in the first sense, and sometimes in the second, but never in the last. In

the first sense it is opposed to *unreality*, or *non-existence*, in the third, it is opposed to *uncertainty* or mere probability.

10. NECESSITY and contingency are opposed to each other, as contingency denotes the mere possible existence or non-existence of an object in any future time, but the opposite of certainty is *unreality*.

11. HENCE we may observe a gradation in the strength of the tendency of the mind towards the motives that are presented to it from that which is infinitely strong, and therefore produces a moral *necessity*, to that which is indefinitely weak, but whose connexion with volition is nevertheless *certain*. To attribute a pursuit equally strong to motives of apparently unequal appetibility is evidently absurd, yet this the necessitarians are forced to maintain, as necessity admits of no degrees. The strength or force of motives, or more properly speaking their appetibility, evidently results from the degree of *apparent good* which they present.

12. BUT it may be replied that neither can reality admit of different degrees, nor consequently can certainty. This is true with respect to the first sense, but not with respect to the second sense of that word. For the foundation of certainty is so much the stronger as it approaches more to necessity.

13. IF

13. IF ends or motives, *apparently equally* desirable, but suggesting different or opposite volitions, be presented to the mind, and if both present a greater good than that resulting from remaining in its actual state by embracing neither, in that case the mind may tend to either, that is, may form a volition to obtain the good presented by either. For though there is no reason for preferring either, yet the good presented by each is a sufficient reason for pursuing that presented by any of them, and the impossibility of pursuing both is a sufficient reason for pursuing one of them. Yet probably some *extrinsic* reason generally suggests the choice, such as that one of them was first thought of, or last thought of, &c.

14. IF motives, *apparently unequally desirable*, be presented to the mind, then if the inequality be *infinite* the mind will *necessarily* pursue the most desirable for the reasons already given.

15. IF the inequality be *finite*, it frequently happens that by considering them in different points of view their appetibility may be inverted, the *most* desirable being in some respects the *least* so, and the least desirable appearing in some lights the *most* so. Hence the mind is free to pursue either from the intrinsic good each holds to its view.

16. THIS

16. THIS inversion becomes so much the easier as the inequality betwixt the proposed motives is apparently smaller, and so much the more difficult as the apparent inequality is greater. And hence we perceive the benefit of instruction, as by its means the *apparent* inequality approaches indefinitely to the *real*.

17. MOTIVES are presented to the mind either by sensation, imagination, passion, sense of duty, fear of remorse, or moral instincts. In general those presented by the three first modes of perception are most pursued, because in receiving them the mind is entirely passive, and their rejection is attended with a greater or lesser degree of pain; whereas the comprehension of the latter, in their full suasive view, requires attention and self command, which are opposed by the natural indolence of the mind, though the importance of the determination to be taken strongly indicate the propriety of applying them, and though the understanding pronounce the pursuit of the object they suggest to be in some respects the greater good. Hence the saying of Medea, *Video meliora, &c.*

18. THE difficulties in which this subject has hitherto been involved have arisen in great measure from the improper expressions used in treating it, most of which are in their literal sense applicable only to corporeal nature which is passive, and therefore suggest false conceptions when applied to mind, which is essentially

fentially active. Thus *motives* seem to imply something active, whereas they are in reality passive, being the ends which the mind pursues or may pursue. They are said to *impel* the mind to action, which again falsely denotes activity, whereas the mind naturally *pursues* them in proportion to the apparent good they present. Thus also *force* and *strength* are improperly applied to them.

I SHALL now proceed to obviate the objections to human liberty advanced by Dr. Priestley, who of all others has stated them with most clearness and precision, occasionally noticing any thing farther relevant to the subject that has been advanced by other writers.

THE DOCTOR, in p. 7 of his Illustrations of Philosophical Necessity, tells us, “ that the liberty he denies to man is that of doing several things, when all the previous circumstances (including the *state of his mind* and his *views of things*) are precisely the same; and asserts, that in the same precise state of mind, and with the same views of things, he would *always* voluntarily make the same choice and come to the same determination.”

By views of things the Doctor evidently means motives, and consequently in some cases, namely, those mentioned in Nos. 9
and

and 14, his assertion is perfectly just, the motive being there supposed to be infinitely desirable, but in most cases, as those mentioned in Nos. 13 and 15, it may be true, and it may also be false; for as in those cases the reasons for opposite determinations are apparently equal, the mind may *at one time* form one choice and at another time another, or it may *always* form the same, or each time a *different*.

THE DOCTOR also says, " he allows to man the liberty of *doing* " whatever he pleases," but the liberty here meant is not the liberty of performing any external action, but the liberty of willing or chusing.

MR. LOCKE seems to think that the will cannot properly be said to be free, because liberty (he says) " is but a power belonging to agents, and cannot be an attribute or modification of " will which is also a power;" but liberty is not merely a power but a species of power, as power may be exerted either necessarily or freely.

To establish his conclusion, Dr. Priestley lays down some observations relative to cause and effect, which being solely applicable to corporeal nature, I omit. He then tells us, p. 13, " that a " particular determination of the mind could not be otherwise " than it was, if the laws of nature be such as that the same de-
" termination

“ termination shall constantly follow the same state of mind and
 “ the same view of things, and it could not be possible for the
 “ same determination to have been otherwise than it *has been, is,*
 “ or *is to be*, unless the laws of nature had been such, as that
 “ though both the state of the mind and the views of things were
 “ the same, the determination might or might not have taken
 “ place. But in this case the determination must have been an
 “ effect without a cause, because in this case, as in that of a
 “ balance, there would have been a change of situation without
 “ any previous change of circumstances, and there cannot be any
 “ other definition of an effect without a cause.”

To this reasoning I reply, that the laws of nature, with respect to intellectual agents, are such, that though the state of mind and the views of things be exactly the same, one and the same determination might not have taken place in the cases mentioned Nos. 13 and 15, and yet whether the same or a different determination take place it will not be an effect without a cause; for as in those cases different motives or final causes, equally attractive, are supposed to occur, which ever of them the mind pursues, its determination will not want a final cause. The comparison of a balance, which will remain in æquilibrium when the scales are loaded with equal weights, is inapplicable, as the balance does not act, but is acted upon, whereas the mind is evidently possessed of an active power of pursuing a proposed end.

THE Doctor further adds, in his reply to Mr. Palmer, p 7.
 “ that certainty or universality is the only possible ground of
 “ concluding that there is a necessity in any case whatever,”
 which is true as far as respects corporeal nature ; but with respect
 to intelligent beings the perceived connexion betwixt their ac-
 tions and a supreme *degree* of apprehended happiness is the
 true ground of the necessity of their volitions when they are
 necessary, as shewn Nos. 9 and 14, which indeed may be indi-
 cated by constancy and universality ; and where this ground does
 not exist, certainty (with respect to our knowledge) cannot be
 obtained.

THE next argument in proof of the necessity of human actions
 is derived from divine præscience. Dr. Priestley states it thus :
 “ As it is not in the compass of power in the author of any
 “ system, that an event should take place without a cause, or
 “ that it should be equally possible for two events to follow the
 “ same circumstances, so neither, supposing this to be possible,
 “ would it be within the compass of knowledge to foresee
 “ such a contingent event ; for as nothing can be known to
 “ *exist*, but what does exist, so certainly nothing can be known
 “ to *arise from what does exist*, but what does arise from it, or
 “ depend upon it ; but according to the definition of the terms,
 “ a contingent event does not depend upon any previous known
 “ circumstances, since some other event might have arisen in the
 “ same

“ same circumstances. All that is in the compass of knowledge
 “ in this case is, to foresee all the different events that might
 “ take place in the same circumstances, but which of them will
 “ actually take place cannot possibly be known.” P. 19.

IN answer to this argument we must observe, that not only the immensely complicated series and concatenation of events which we denominate the *actual system of the world* was originally *barely possible*, but also an infinite number of other systems differently arranged and equally complicated. In some of these the contingent act appeared linked with one of the motives with which, in the same circumstances, it might possibly be connected, and in another system a very different event might arise from the equally possible connexion with the opposite motive, as in the cases Nos. 13 and 15. Each of these events would give room to a totally different series of subsequent events, for the greatest and most important arise from others seemingly the least important. Among these different systems God has chosen the *best*, or at least *one of the best*, and upon this choice his fore-knowledge of that determinate contingent object which is to happen, to which the Doctor alludes, and where apparently unequal motives do not determine it, is grounded.

To this argument Mr. Crombie, in his *Treatise on Philosophic Necessity*, p. 73. farther adds, that since the Deity foresees future events they must necessarily take place. But as knowledge of

any kind is perfectly extrinsic to the events known, and exerts no sort of influence over them, all that can justly be inferred from the infallibility of divine præscience is, that the event foreseen will *certainly* and infallibly, but not necessarily happen; for to secure the infallibility of divine fore-knowledge, the future existence of the event foreseen, and not the impossibility whether physical or moral of its non-existence, or in other words its certainty, but not its impossibility, must be supposed.

ALL the objections hitherto made to human liberty seem to me reducible to those I have here noticed. It is needless to adduce any argument in proof of it, as the consciousness of our being ourselves the active principle from which our determinations originate, and the remorse incident to the abuse of this self-determining power impress the fullest conviction of this important truth.